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Housekeepers' Chat

Friday, Oct. 7.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

SUBJECT: "When Junior Refuses to Eat."

ANNOUNCEMENT: Today's program deals with one phase of the child feeding problem. Information approved by the U. S. Bureau of Home Economics. Mothers desiring material on child feeding may send for the following Farmers' Bulletins: "Food for Young Children," and "Good Proportions in the Diet."

I'm going to tell you a true story today. A true story of a little boy who worried his parents, his sisters, "his cousins and his aunts," because he politely, but firmly, refused to eat certain foods which were "good for him." He did not like fish, or eggs, or spinach, or cooked tomatoes, or string beans. When his mother served liver and bacon, he ate the bacon, but not the liver. There were other good foods he wouldn't eat. He refused them all, with the same comment: "I don't like the way it tastes."

His mother, whom I shall call Mrs. Roe, tried all the popular methods for persuading children to eat. She eliminated sweets from his diet; she bribed him; she even scolded him sometimes at the table, which was a very poor practice, because it made the boy cry, and the rest of the family feel very uncomfortable. Finally, she let the child go without food, till she was afraid he would starve. She knew that many "finicky" children will eat, if they go without food long enough. But this plan did not work with Richard. He never was hungry enough to eat fish, or eggs, or spinach.

"We must see a doctor about Richard," said Mrs. Roe, to Mr. Roe. "He worries me to distraction. He simply cannot keep up with the other children in the second grade, unless he eats. Let's consult a child specialist, or ask the school nurse, why he refuses to eat certain foods!"

Mr. Roe realized that the situation was serious. Richard was a precocious child, imaginative, and unusually sensitive. He seemed to be in fairly good health, except that he was not gaining weight. Richard's mother was wearing herself out, entreating the child to eat.

Mr. Roe was a magazine writer. He wrote stories about famous people, and sometimes had their pictures published, with the stories. Richard was always interested in these interviews. That gave Mr. Roe an idea. Instead of asking a doctor, or a child specialist, or the school nurse, why Richard wouldn't eat, why not ask Richard himself? It wouldn't hurt anything, to try it.

"Richard," said Mr. Roe, one evening, "how would you like to be interviewed?"



"Me?" said Richard. "I sure would like to be interviewed, Daddy! Can I have my picture in the magazine, too?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Roe. "I'll write a story about you, for parents of small boys and girls. Come over here and sit on the davenport with me. That's fine. I'll ask you questions, and you must answer each one as carefully as you can. Let's talk about what we like to eat, first. Are you ready?"

"Sure," said Richard, "and don't forget about the picture in the paper."

"Question Number One," began Mr. Roe. "Why don't you like fish?"

"Because it doesn't taste good," replied Richard, glibly.

"Watch out!" warned Mr. Roe. "You must tell the truth! Think hard, for one minute, and then tell me the real reason you don't like fish."

The little boy wrinkled his brow, so that he might think hard. "I'll tell you why," he said finally. "I don't like fish, because it is full of bones, and I hate to get bones in my throat."

"I see," said Mr. Roe. "That's a good answer. I'll write it down. Now tell me why you didn't eat your stewed tomatoes, and string beans, this evening."

"They didn't taste good," said Richard. "Aren't you going to write that down?"

"No, Richard. My interview pencil writes only the truth. Try again. Why didn't you eat your cooked tomatoes, and string beans?"

"Because cooked tomatoes have skins on, and I always find strings in my string beans. That's the real truth!"

"All right. It's the real truth I want. Last night you ate the cheese and lettuce, and left the pear, in your salad. Did the pear have strings in it?"

"Yes," said Richard, confidentially. "I don't like food with strings and peelings in. Do you, Daddy?"

"I'm not partial to strings and peelings," admitted Mr. Roe. "But why don't you like liver, Richard? It doesn't have strings or peelings. Why don't you eat the liver, when Mother serves liver and bacon?"

This question was the most difficult one that Richard had been asked. He tried to formulate an answer, while his father waited patiently.

"Daddy," said Richard, seriously, "where does liver come from? And why is Aunt Ella Always taking dark brown medicine for hers?"

I am afraid that Mr. Roe said something very uncomplimentary about Aunt Ella, at this juncture. Anyway, a short recess was declared, while Mr. Roe told Richard why liver is considered an important food, for growing children.





"Now," said Mr. Roe, "I'd like to ask you one more question, Richard. Why won't you eat spinach?"

"Because of the way it looks. Do you remember the time I visited Uncle Jim, on the farm? We went wading, and there was green stuff in the water that looked just like spinach. Green and slippery. We had fun, though, wading. We would have waded longer, only Uncle Jim had to look at his incubator."

"I see," said Mr. Roe, "I really do see, at last. You went with Uncle Jim, to look at his incubator, and you haven't been able to eat an egg, since you saw the chicks hatching in the incubator. Well, well! How simple things are, when you understand them!"

That's not all of the interview, but it's enough to give you an idea of what took place. Do you wonder how I know about it? I was sitting in the same room, pretending to read a paper, while the interview took place.

Now I'll explain how Richard's information was used against him -- and for him. Mrs. Roe bought fish that did not contain bones, and Richard ate it. She saw that there were no peelings on his tomatoes, or his squash, no strings in his beans, that his spinach was not slippery. Richard himself took a great interest in his case. As his objection to certain foods were removed, he ate the foods, and finally forgot all about refusing them.

Mr. Roe explained that the eggs they used were not like the ones on the farm -- that they were eating eggs, not hatching eggs. That satisfied Richard. Before long he forgot his prejudice against eggs. He can't eat liver yet, without making faces, but he is trying to overcome his dislike for it. We told Aunt Ella that she must never discuss her ailments before Richard, and never at the table. Poor lady -- she thinks we are very unsympathetic!

Of course, not every child who resuses to eat could be dealt with as Richard was. But there are probably many sensitive children, who have acquired a dislike for certain foods, because of unpleasant suggestion. In taste, or texture, or appearance, a food may remind a child of something displeasing. It is helpful to analyze these prejudices, wherever possible, because it is easier for parents to undo a bad food habit when they understand how it began.

There are many other angles to the problem of child feeding. We shall discuss the subject again before long.

I believe we had a question today, left over from yesterday. The question was: "What is dill?" The answer: "Dill is an herb, of the parsley family. The leaves are used for flavoring soups and sauces. The seeds are used for seasoning pickles."

Of course, some one will say, everybody knows that! But I assure you they didn't. You'd be surprised, how many people think that dill is a fat cucumber pickle.

I wonder how many of you guessed right, on all the questions asked this week. By the way, here's another question, for Monday: "What are anchovies? And what is anchovy paste?" I asked Lucy, and she says anchovies have something to do with steamships, but she must be thinking of anchors.

You will need your pencils Monday, for a menu and recipes.

